Running Head: INITIATION PRACTICES AND GROUP COHESION

'We do it for the team' - Student athletes' initiation practices and their impact on group cohesion.

Lafferty, M.E.[1], Wakefield, C.[2] & Fountain, H.[3]
[1] Department of Psychology, University of Chester. [2] Department of Psychology, Liverpool Hope University. [3]School of Life, Sport and Social Sciences, Edinburgh Napier University.

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Corresponding Author:
Dr. Moira E. Lafferty.
Department of Psychology,
University of Chester.
Parkgate Road.
Chester.
CH1 4BJ.
Email: m.lafferty@chester.ac.uk
Telephone: +441244 513438

Dr. Caroline Wakefield.
Faculty of Health Sciences,
Liverpool Hope University.
Hope Park.
Liverpool.
LI6 9JD.
Email: wakefic@hope.ac.uk
Telephone: +441512913715

Holly Brown
School of Life, Sport and Social Sciences,
Edinburgh Napier University.
Craiglockhart Campus,
Glenlockhart Road, Edinburgh.
City of Edinburgh.
EH14 1DJ
Email: H.Fountain@napier.ac.uk
Telephone: +441244 513465

ABSTRACT

Hazing, or inappropriate initiation activities, are a well-documented occurrence within university sport team societies. This study examined the occurrence of initiation activities in relation to team cohesion. 154 participants completed the Group Environment Questionnaire and the Team Cohesion Questionnaire in relation to initiation activities at their institution. Results revealed that athletes were more aware of appropriate than inappropriate initiation activities, with males being aware of a higher occurrence of inappropriate activities than females. Results were also analysed by sport type, revealing that interactive team sport players recorded higher hazing scores than co-acting players. With regard to cohesion, no significant relationship was found between hazing and cohesion suggesting the notion that initiations enhance cohesion in sport is untrue.

Players joining a new team, squad or group are often subjected to degrading challenges designed to embarrass, humiliate and physically and mentally abuse them prior to

acceptance onto the team (Nuwer, 2004). This progression from outsider to accepted in-group member has often been described as a 'rite de passage' (Campo, Poulos, & Sipple, 2005) and the activities described as initiations or hazing ceremonies. In what is considered by many to be the first work in the area Hoover and Pollard (1999) defined hazing as;

> …any activity expected of someone joining a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses or endangers, regardless of the person's willingness to participate. This does not include activities such as rookies carrying the balls, team parties with community games, or going out with your teammates, unless an atmosphere of humiliation, degradation, abuse or danger arises. (p.8)

Hoover and Pollard also stated that initiation activities or behaviours could be sub-divided into four categories that in effect created a continuum, anchored at one end by behaviours deemed to be acceptable and at the other extreme unacceptable and potentially illegal behaviours, defined as hazing.

Both the definition of hazing and the categorisation of activities raise interesting points that are often overlooked by athletes and those instigating team initiation ceremonies (Keating et al., 2005). Firstly, it is not only the physical danger associated with an activity that can lead to it being categorised as hazing but also the psychological impact and trauma felt or suffered. Secondly, ostensibly harmless activities can be considered hazing if they have a negative psychological impact on the individual (Crow & MacIntosh, 2009). For instance, the seemingly innocuous activity of the new player having to sing a song to the team could be defined as an inappropriate form of initiation if the player feels humiliated and degraded by the forced completion of the task. However, many team members may consider this to be a harmless, appropriate, and justifiable initiation activity. One possible explanation for this is that many student and young athletes are unable to define hazing (Allen & Madden, 2008; Crow & MacIntosh, 2009).

Allen and Madden (2008), in one of the largest studies conducted into initiations and hazing in the USA with student-athletes, reported that there was confusion and a lack of knowledge about what constituted inappropriate initiation activities and hazing. They found that student-athletes believed hazing involved physical force, such as beatings, paddling (beating and spanking with a paddle) and acts of physical restraint (e.g. tying people up). Furthermore, students believed that if the activity could be deemed as productive, for example in the eyes of the initiators it would help the team bond and or, the initiate agreed and consented to participate, then activities were not hazing and were merely acceptable initiation tasks.

Whether these views are formed through a lack of knowledge and understanding or processes related to groupthink, polarisation, and submergence (Janis, 1972) it would appear that student-athletes rationalise and justify initiation activities based upon perceived willingness to engage in, and supposed benefits of participation (Keating et al., 2005). These hypothetical benefits include demonstrating allegiance and dedication to the team and transitioning from new to accepted in-group member (Crow & MacIntosh, 2009; Kirby & Wintrup, 2002; Waldron, Lynn, & Krane, 2011). Waldron et al. (2011) also suggested that a common explanation for engaging in initiation rituals is the misguided belief that they enhance the dynamics and subsequent cohesion of the team. Although student-athletes continue to hold this view, research has failed to consistently establish a positive relationship between cohesion and hazing (Waldron & Kowalski, 2009).

One of the only studies to quantifiably explore the relationship between initiation and hazing activities on cohesion was conducted by Van Raalte, Cornelius, Linder, and Brewer (2007). 196 collegiate athletes in the United States completed a psychometric questionnaire package designed to assess cohesion (Group Environment Questionnaire; Widmeyer, Brawley, & Carron, 1985) and initiation activities (Team Initiation Questionnaire; Hoover,

1999). They found that hazing, as measured by inappropriate team building activities, was negatively associated with task group attraction and task integration. Appropriate team building activities, such as meals out, positive behaviour contracts and team oaths, were related to athletes' feelings towards the group as indicated by higher levels of social cohesion. Although these findings were significant the correlation *r* values were relatively small indicating a weak relationship (Cohen, 1988). The study found no relationship between appropriate initiation activities and task cohesion which suggests that task cohesion is not related to team bonding experiences. Although the sample contained both male and female athletes, Van Raalte et al. did not analyse the data for gender differences, nor did they explore whether different sport types (such as team or individual) engaged in more or less appropriate or inappropriate activities. This is not uncommon as although many studies report participants drawn from a range of sports there is a tendency for results to be analysed as one cohort (e.g. Campo, Poulos, & Sipple, 2005; Waldron & Kowalski, 2009; Waldron, Lynn, & Krane, 2011).

Allen and Madden (2008) in the American National Study of Student Hazing did analyse some of the data from student athletes with respect to type of sport and level. Findings indicated that many hazing activities involved alcohol and participation was reported to promote bonds and group unity, indicating the perception of increased cohesion. Although athletes were categorised according to level of participation (varsity, club, intramural sport) data were not analysed with respect to gender or actual type of sporting activity. These facts combined with differences in University sport in the United Kingdom would suggest that there is a need to explore initiation activities with respect to sport type and gender.

For example, it would be logical to assume that athletes in interacting sports, usually described as those requiring the cooperation and combined effort of all members to achieve

the goals (e.g. team based), will engage in more appropriate and inappropriate activities than athletes from sports were success is based on individual performance (i.e. co-acting teams). There are many reasonable explanations for this assertion including the fact that interacting teams are reported to have higher task cohesion than co-acting sports (Matheson, Mathes, & Murray, 1997) and are often seen to be a more socially cohesive group. The suggestion that they are also more likely to engage in a higher number of inappropriate activities may well be due to significant differences in the sporting culture and traditions that underpin the likelihood of engagement in initiation ceremonies. For example, interactive team sports by their very nature link strongly to the power and performance model of sport (Coakley, 2007), and team athletes are more likely to engage in initiation activities in an attempt to show allegiance to the team and gain social acceptance compared to athletes engaging in individual sports (Waldron, Lynn, & Krane, 2011).

Johnson and Holman (2009) suggested that the continued rise in the number of women participating in traditionally masculine sports such as football, rugby league and union, could mean that the initiation activities of these female teams have become more masculinised, mirroring their male counterparts. This combined with the increasing joint socialising between male and female team-based sport societies in the United Kingdom may indicate that the initiation activities of female sport teams could include an increased number of inappropriate activities when compared to those in co-acting sports.

To-date, most research into initiations and hazing has been conducted with student-athletes in North America and Canada there are relatively few quantitative studies to emerge from the United Kingdom. Groves, Griggs, and Leflay (2012) argued that there is an urgent need to redress the paucity of research in the United Kingdom to provide information on levels of appropriate and inappropriate activities and gender differences.

With these facts in mind, the primary aim of the present exploratory quantitative study was to examine the level of appropriate and inappropriate initiation activities engaged in by student-athletes in the United Kingdom and whether there was any relationship with team cohesion. A subsidiary aim was to identify whether differences existed between genders and the type of sport. Building on and extending the work of Van Raalte et al. (2007) we hypothesized that; (H1) there will be a positive relationship between social cohesion and appropriate team building activities, (H2) males and females will report different levels of engagement in appropriate team building activities, and (H3) engagement in inappropriate team building activities will differ between males and females, such that females will engage in more appropriate and fewer inappropriate activities compared to males . Based on our discussion of the work of Coakley (2007), Waldron et al. (2011) and Matheson et al. (1997) with respect to sport type we hypothesized that there will be (H4) a relationship between the mean hazing score and cohesion scores for interactive but not co-acting teams and (H5) the mean hazing index score will be higher in interacting compared to co-acting sports in this sample.

Method

Participants

One-hundred fifty-four (98 male and 55 female, age range 18-24 years) current university sport players from the North West, Central, and Eastern United Kingdom participated in the study. The main sport of the participants was varied and represented a range of interacting (e.g. football, hockey, rugby, lacrosse) and co-acting (e.g. swimming, fencing, boxing, tennis) sports. Of the 154 participant sample, 112 athletes represented interactive sports (n=81 males; n=30 females) and 42 co-acting (n=17 males; n=25 females). Department and Faculty Ethics Committees granted approval for the present study and all participants provided informed consent.

Instrumentation

The Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ; Widemeyer, Brawley, & Carron, 1985).

The GEQ was used to assess components of social and task cohesion through attraction to the group and group integration. Attraction to group task (ATGT) was measured by four items including 'I am happy with my teams desire to win'. Attraction to group social (ATGS) included five items such as 'some of my best friends are on this team'. The group integration task (GIT) subscale had five items and the group integration social (GIS) four items, these subscales included statements such as 'our team is united in trying to reach its goals for performance' (GIT) and 'our team would like to spend time together in the off-season' (GIS). Participants respond to each statement using a 9-point Likert scale with anchors of 1 'strongly disagree' and 9 'strongly agree'. For the present sample, Cronbach Alpha statistics ranged from .70 to .79.

Team Initiation Questionnaire (TIQ; Hoover, 1999).

The TIQ measures 4 broad areas of initiation activities (acceptable, questionable, alcohol-related and unacceptable behaviours) by asking participants to read descriptions of 24 activities and identify whether, in their team, they had done it or seen it, heard or suspected it took place or the reverse (i.e. did not happen or they did not suspect). The research team made minor colloquial changes to some of the statements to make the language of the TIQ more representative of the UK. For example 'attending a skit night or team roast' became 'attending a team meal', and 'keeping a specific grade point average' in the present study became 'keeping work up to date'. These changes represented the types of activities normally conducted by UK teams and were considered comparative taking into account cultural differences and retained positive behaviour equivalences as in the original Hoover Questionnaire (Hoover, 1999). Cronbach alpha values for both the acceptable and

inappropriate team building scales were deemed acceptable at .70 and .73 respectively for the present sample (Streiner, 2003).

Procedure

The research team approached athletes and players at clubs, multi-sport team events, and social gatherings after initial approval from the event organiser. To avoid biasing the results and to ensure that participants received consistent information researchers used an introductory script to explain the nature of the study to the athletes. The script did not mention the exploration of hazing and introduced the study as an investigation into team building and cohesion.

Athletes who gave their informed consent to participate in the research then received a questionnaire package containing the TIQ, GEQ and a short demographic sheet. They completed the questionnaire package individually in their own time while at the event and returned it to one of the researchers who remained on hand in case any questions arose.

Data Analysis

To gain a truer representation of the level of initiation activities responses were only included in the analysis if they reported doing or seeing an activity to take place. Of the 24 activities identified in the TIQ, 11 have been previously categorised as inappropriate and 13 as appropriate (Hoover, 1999). Occurrence rates were summed to create a hazing (inappropriate) and team building (appropriate) indices. In line with the work of Van Raalte et al. an overall team building score was calculated by subtracting the hazing score from the team building score. A composite cohesiveness index was calculated from the sum of all the cohesion sub-domain scores (Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley, 1985). Hypotheses were tested

through a series of inferential parametric tests of difference and correlations, and significance for all tests was set at $p < .05$.

Results

Mean results for cohesion, overall team building and appropriate and inappropriate activities (hazing index) are shown in Table 1.

**********Insert Table 1 near here**********

Athletes in the present sample reported engaging in, or knowing about the occurrence of, more appropriate activities than activities classified as hazing ($t(153) = 15.13$, $p < .001$). Pearson product-moment correlations showed no significant relationships between the composite scores of the GEQ and TIQ for males, females, or the sample as a whole.

**********Insert Table 2 near here**********

A gender by sport type MANOVA was performed to explore differences in composite GEQ and TIQ scores (table 2). No main effect was found for gender; however there was a significant main effect for sport (Wilks' Lambda = .91, $F_{(4, 146)} = 3.77$, $p < .006$, partial $\eta^2 = .094$) and a significant sport by gender interaction (Wilks' Lambda = .65, $F_{(4, 146)} = 2.52$, $p < .044$, partial $\eta^2 = .065$).

With respect to cohesion scores a significant between sport difference emerged for task cohesion ($F_{(1,149)} = 5.43$, $p < .05$) and for the composite cohesion score ($F_{(1,149)} = 4.89$, $p < .05$) with interacting sport players reporting significantly higher mean scores than co-acting

players (Table 2). Results indicated that task cohesion differed depending upon sport played and gender ($F_{(1,149)} = 4.73$, $p < .05$). Follow up t-tests indicated that female interactive sport players reported significantly higher task cohesion than female co-acting players ($t(53) = 3.50$, $p < .001$). No significant relationships were found between the total mean hazing score and total cohesion score for interacting ($r(112) = -.17$, $p = .07$) and co-acting ($r(42) = .003$, $p = .98$) athletes. Similarly, no significant relationships emerged between the overall team building score and total cohesion score for either the interacting *($r(112) = 0.10$, $p = .30$)* or co-acting ($r(42) = 0.12$, $p = .46$) sport groups.

With respect to differences between interactive and coactive sport groups on the TIQ composite scores the MANOVA results indicated that males and females differed with respect to reported engagement in or observation of inappropriate activities ($F_{(1,149)} = 4.190$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.03$) and overall team building ($F_{(1,149)} = 7.37$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.05$). Specifically, males reported a significantly higher inappropriate/hazing index score ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 2.60$) than females ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 2.04$), in contrast females had a higher overall team building index score ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 2.51$) than the male sport players ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 2.71$). A significant difference also emerged with respect to sport type played and hazing index ($F_{(1,149)} = 7.48$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.05$). Interactive team sport players recorded higher hazing index mean scores ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 2.62$) compared to co-acting players ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 1.73$).

Discussion.

The aim of this exploratory study was to investigate UK student-athletes' observation of, and engagement in, initiation activities and examine whether there was any link to cohesion, through partial replication of the work of Van Raalte et al. (2007). Five hypotheses were proposed which guided the data analysis. The results show that in the present sample

there was no significant relationship between cohesion scores and team building activities, either appropriate or inappropriate, leading us to reject our first hypothesis. These findings do not support the earlier work of Van Raalte et al. (2007) and indicate that student-athletes from the United Kingdom hold different views to those from North America regarding initiation activities and their relationship with cohesion. Interestingly, the mean hazing index score of the present sample was higher than that reported in the study by Van Raalte et al. indicating that athletes in the United Kingdom reported engaging in, or seeing more inappropriate initiation activities. This is surprising given that historically hazing is associated with the American academic fraternity and sporting culture (Trota & Johnson, 2004) and suggests that hazing activities are prevalent in the UK. One reason for this could be the link to alcohol, as it is well documented that hazing occurs with alcohol consumption and UK students engage in more drinking related activities than their USA counterparts due to both legal and cultural differences (Tinmouth, 2004).

Often student-athletes discuss, and justify, initiation ceremonies based on the argument that they build team spirit, develop bonds, and enhance cohesion (Campo et al., 2005; Waldron & Kowalski, 2009). However, results from the present study suggest that this commonly held belief is spurious. This raises the question as to why, despite evidence to the contrary and moves to stop and eradicate initiation activities, student-athletes continue to engage in and believe that initiations are a positive activity. It may be that there is incongruence between the student perception of the type of cohesion developed through intitiations and cohesion as measured by the GEQ. A second argument may be that sport players continue to use the claim of enhancing cohesion as a means of overcoming cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Individually, athletes may hold conflicting cognitions related to initiations for example; ‘they are wrong’, and ‘we have to run an initiation evening’. A method of overcoming or reducing the dissonance is to rationalise that initiations have a

purpose. i.e., enhancing cohesion. As this message gets passed from team member to team member, and subsequently team to team, year to year, the view that cohesion is enhanced becomes an accepted rationalisation for the tradition polarised by groupthink (Janis, 1972).

The second and third hypotheses explored whether gender differences exist with respect to appropriate and inappropriate/hazing activities. Previous research has not explored gender differences per se although Johnson and Holman (2009) argued that there is evidence to suggest, at least in the USA, that females are engaging in more inappropriate activities mirroring those of male sport players. In the present sample no significant difference was found between males and females for appropriate activities, thus we reject our second hypothesis, however males were found to engage in more inappropriate activities than females leading us to accept the third hypothesis that a gender differences would be found with respect to the level of inappropriate activities. This is an interesting finding that suggests that although male and female teams in the UK tend to be part of the same sport society they hold differing views about unacceptable initiation activities, with female sport players engaging in less inappropriate hazing rituals.

Finally, no significant relationship was found between the mean hazing score and cohesion for either the interacting or co-acting sport group however, the hazing score was significantly higher for the interactive sport group than the co-acting group, leading to the rejection of the fourth and acceptance of the fifth hypotheses. This finding supports the work of Waldron and Kowalski (2009) who, in a qualitative study, found hazing to occur more in aggressive, contact, and team sports. Interactive sports require close team work and cooperation which suggests a strong allegiance to the group; these factors may predispose initiators to engage in more hazing activities when initiating new members, in the belief that it increases feelings of belonging and social dependency (Keating et al., 2005). Successful involvement reinforces group hierarchy, belonging, social identity and status and

participation becomes a badge of honour. The increased hazing in interactive sports may also have a historical and traditional element. Robbins (2004) suggested that activities designed for initiates typically follow prescribed protocols, passed down year to year. The interactive sports in the present sample could be classified as long standing traditional UK University sports, therefore the culture of initiations has evolved over time and activities moved along the initiation continuum from appropriate to inappropriate, as each year, each group of initiators plans newer, more challenging and in some instances more dangerous tasks.

Although the present study has shed light on the level of appropriate and inappropriate/hazing activities engaged in or observed by a sample of UK University athletes it is not without limitations. Although the sample size is comparable to the study of Van Raalte et al. (2007) and was drawn from several institutions it represents the views of only a minority of those involved in university sport. Future quantitative studies should endeavour to increase the sample size to enhance knowledge and understanding of initiation activities. For future research we would also suggest that the TIQ is further modified so that the reporting of 'done / engaged in ' an activity is separated from the 'seen', therefore allowing researchers to more accurately measure the effects of actual participation. Re-developing the scoring system would also increase the validity of the measure as would the inclusion of demographic questions relating to the teams they are involved with and the number of social events held by that team. We also suggested in the discussion that there may be discrepancies between our measurement of cohesion and the student-athletes' use of this word in justifying initiations, this is an area worthy of further exploration through qualitative methods. Developing knowledge through a qualitative approach would increase our understanding of the perceived role of initiations and extend our understanding in this area.

CONCLUSION

Groves et al. (2012) called for future research to explore the level of hazing 'among university athletes in the United Kingdom' (p.126), the present study has provided evidence to show that hazing does occur and that despite arguments that it builds cohesion the results of this study indicate that this is not the case. It would also appear that even though universities and student unions' have banned initiation activities, they are still commonplace. Future quantitative and qualitative research is needed to increase understanding of the role, extent, and level of initiation activities in UK University sport. This will allow athletic unions to work proactively with team captains and club officials to develop more appropriate welcome activities for new members.

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Table 1 – Mean cohesion, overall team building, appropriate activities and hazing index scores.

	Composite GEQ Scores			Composite TIQ Scores		
	Social cohesion Mean (SD)	Task cohesion Mean (SD)	Overall cohesion score Mean (SD)	Appropriate activities Mean (SD)	Hazing index Mean (SD)	Overall team building score Mean (SD)
Sample	44.41 (12.23)	45.25 (12.95)	89.66 (23.00)	6.91 (2.75)	3.60 (2.50)	3.28 (2.70)
Males	44.42 (12.72)	45.13 (13.23)	89.55 (23.77)	6.95 (2.99)	4.12 (2.60)	2.83 (2.71)
Females	44.38 (11.41)	45.47 (12.56)	89.85 (21.80)	6.80 (2.29)	2.73 (2.04)	4.07 (2.51)

Table 2 – Mean results for composite GEQ and TIQ scores with respect to sport classification (interacting or co-acting) and gender.

			Composite GEQ Scores			Composite TIQ Scores		
			Social cohesion	Task cohesion	Overall cohesion	Appropriate activities index	Inappropriate activities/ hazing index	Overall team building score
Total Sample	Interacting	*M*	45.65	46.70	92.35	7.07	4.05	3.02
		SD	12.40	13.15	23.26	2.80	2.62	2.62
	Co-acting	*M*	41.81	41.69	83.50	6.43	2.48	3.95
		SD	12.24	11.75	21.96	2.60	1.73	2.70
Males	Interacting	*M*	44.90	45.20	90.10	7.25	4.39	2.85
		SD	12.55	13.22	23.57	2.86	2.62	2.58
	Co-acting	*M*	42.12	44.82	86.94	5.53	2.82	2.71
		SD	13.69	13.67	25.26	3.30	2.13	3.33
Females	Interacting	*M*	46.70	50.40	97.10	6.60	3.13	3.47
		SD	11.04	12.49	21.14	2.63	2.40	2.71
	Co-acting	*M*	41.60	39.56	81.16	7.04	2.24	4.8
		SD	11.44	9.99	19.60	1.84	1.40	2.06